

A photograph of a paved path leading through a lush green park. The path is made of light-colored gravel or asphalt and curves gently to the right. On the left side of the path is a large, well-maintained green lawn with several large, mature trees. On the right side, there is a dense line of trees and shrubs. The background shows more trees and a bright, slightly hazy sky. The overall scene is peaceful and inviting.

Town of Westfield

Pathways to the Future

Parks and Recreation Master Plan
2005-2009

Westfield Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Town of Westfield

130 Penn Street
Westfield, IN 46074
(317) 896-5577

Town Council

Teresa Otis Skelton, President. Current term ends December 31st, 2006
Jack Hart, Vice President. Current term ends December 31st 2007
Bob Smith, Member. Current term ends December 31st, 2007
David Mikesell, Member. Current term ends December 31st, 2006
Ron Thomas, Member. Current term ends December 31st, 2007

Town Manager

Jerry Rosenberger

Parks Advisory Committee

Alyn Bernell	E. T. Engelbrecht
Scott Robinson	Melody Sweat
Mic Mead	David Gill
Steve Reitmeyer	Aaron Peskuski
Jeff Burt	Will Doss
Alan Young	John Talbot
Dan Degnan	B. Chris Stice

The Importance of Parks and Recreation

The idea that parks and recreation opportunities are crucial to overall personal and community-wide quality of life has been gaining prominence during the past decade. Since then, several studies have focused on how a community park system can enhance the general welfare of area residents.

These studies have found that there are individual benefits in both physical and emotional health, broader benefits to the environment and general social welfare, as well as economic advantages to the community at large.

The physical benefits are obvious and tangible. The more exercise one gets, the better physical shape s/he is in, the better s/he feels, and the more likely s/he is to engage in leisure pursuits. Being physically healthy lowers the chances of life-threatening diseases, lowers health care costs, and increases one's overall satisfaction with life.

Social and emotional benefits are felt at both the individual and community level. Having a park to socialize in, as well as recreational activities to participate in, allows individuals to meet other people, interact with all age and ability levels, and increase their awareness of what makes the community vibrant.

Environmental benefits are also clear. Protecting green spaces also protects our water supply, our wildlife, and our air. Wetlands serve as wildlife habitat and environmental education centers. They absorb flood waters, and reduce pollutant and sediment loads in storm runoff. Forested lands control soil erosion, clear the air of pollutants, absorb carbon dioxide and other harmful greenhouse gasses, and shelter us from heat and wind.

Parks can also provide substantial economic advantages to communities that have and maintain a thriving park and recreation system. Open space preservation is a vital component to "growing smart" and encouraging compact urban development. Parks and open space create a high quality of life that attracts industries and business to communities. Several studies have highlighted the fact that both large and small businesses consider leisure opportunities an important factor in determining location. Other studies have noted that land values near or next to greenspaces are more valuable than those properties farther away. Across the United States, access to parks and open spaces has become a measure of community wealth.

With all of these benefits, fostering a vibrant park and recreation system is an obvious and vital choice for Westfield to make. The Westfield Town Council intends to have this document serve as a framework for providing such vital services to Westfield and Washington Township.

Agency Profile

The Town of Westfield functions through a council/town manager organization. Westfield citizens elect five town council members, who in turn appoint a town manager to implement policies and manage day-to-day operations.

The Town of Westfield currently comprises approximately 10 square miles within the 56 square mile Washington Township. Westfield's jurisdiction also extends to certain lands within unincorporated Washington Township.

There is currently one staff member in the planning department whose work load includes park planning activities. There is also one staff member in the public works department who focuses on park site maintenance.

Westfield first formed a parks advisory committee in 1997 composed of both town and township residents. This advisory committee assisted in preparing an initial park master plan in 1999. Specific members have changed since first appointed, but both town and township residents continue to serve on the committee.

Since the first park plan was prepared, Westfield has experienced explosive growth and development pressure, and is currently evaluating its existing comprehensive and parks master plans and has prepared an economic development plan and development initiative.

Community Description

Natural Features and Landscape

Hamilton County is in the central part of Indiana and comprises 396 square miles. It is located about 20 miles north of Indianapolis. The county consists mainly of a flat plain that is divided by the west fork of White River and by several creeks, streams, and drainage ways. The county is entirely within the drainage basin of the west fork of White River. This area is typified by minimal topographical relief and soils that are usually poorly drained glacial tills.

The majority of land in Washington Township is agricultural. Although several industrial and residential areas are present, they are clustered around the town corporate limits. Sites that remain natural are minimal. There are small pockets of wooded tracts, and three or four streams. Two of these streams, Little Eagle Creek and Finley Creek, have potential to be good natural sites and/or greenway corridors if land along the waterways could be preserved from development. As can be expected in the agricultural and urban mix that typifies Westfield, plant and animal species tend toward the familiar. There are always white-tailed deer, raccoons, squirrels, and opossums to be seen, as well as the usual songbirds. Besides the ubiquitous corn and soybeans, some natural stands of beech-maple and oak can be found. And, of course, the typical residential landscape of Kentucky bluegrass with yews and burning bush is found everywhere.

Man-made, Historical, and Cultural Features

The Town of Westfield is located in the west-central section of Hamilton County, and greatly resembles the physiographical features of the area. The area is flat and contains primarily Crosby-Brookston soils. The climate is typical for Indiana: hot and humid in summer and cold and humid in winter. Precipitation, in the form of rain and snow, is approximately 40 inches per year, and is fairly evenly distributed throughout the seasons. Although both Geist and Morse Reservoirs are located in Hamilton County, Westfield gets its potable water supply from wells.

Several transportation arteries crisscross Washington Township. US 31 runs north and south through the entire township. State Road 32 crosses east to west, and State Road 38 runs northwest to southeast in the upper north east section of the township. Plans developed by the Hamilton County Alternative Transportation Task Force have identified several pathways along existing paved roadways. These plans and specifications have been adopted by reference by the Westfield Town Council, and are incorporated into town planning. Westfield has constructed a trail connecting the downtown area, school campus, several residential neighborhoods, Cool Creek Park, and two of the town's park sites. Land along Cool Creek itself offers an outstanding opportunity to create a riparian trail throughout the southeastern portion of Washington Township. A trail along Cool Creek could connect numerous residential neighborhoods with commercial sites, parks, elementary schools, and the City of Carmel. Two railroad corridors run through the township; both are no longer in use and have been abandoned. The Monon line travels north and south, while the Central Indiana line crosses the township east to west. Plans for each railroad right-of-way include developing a multi-use transportation and recreation corridor. There are also several pipelines that cross the township in a southwest to northeast direction. It is possible to include at least a few of these in future trail planning. If all of these connections were to be completed, residents would have ample pedestrian options to travel to work, school, and play.

Social and Economic Factors

Westfield contains a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial areas. The vast majority of single-family residential and agricultural land lies outside the corporate boundaries. Much of the commercial and industrial tracts are grouped around the transit corridors of US 31 and SR 32. There are a few pockets of multi-family residential, but the majority of housing available is found in single-family residential subdivisions. There are a few recently approved housing subdivisions that somewhat break this mold. These developments are arranged around a planned community that mixes housing types, commercial, and recreational components within the same tract. These types of developments present an exciting way in which town and developer can partner to provide recreational opportunities to the community at large.

Westfield can accommodate the public's recreational needs through cooperative ventures like that mentioned above, as well as through partnering with local school administration. The town and Westfield-Washington Schools have initiated a partnering relationship to explore cooperative ventures. In October of 1998, both entities signed a lease agreement that has allowed the town to develop Asa Bales Park, a previously underused school site.

Also, the Town and School administration are exploring the possibility of allowing the town to pay the salary of the school's recreation coordinator during the summer months. This will permit the recreation director to work throughout the year, and will let the Town have an experienced employee to develop and operate programs for the public.

Also available to Westfield is the Washington Township park and recreation board. This recently-formed board provides yet another method of partnering to provide both park facilities and recreational opportunities. The Township park board has acquired a 40 acre parcel to develop into a passive, nature oriented park, which will be available to all township residents. Additionally, the township collects a recreation tax which will allow for the expenditures of park equipment.

Existing Facilities

The Town currently owns six park sites.

Asa Bales Park is located in the heart of the downtown area. It consists of ten acres and contains a picnic shelter, two play areas, and a walking path. Future plans call for the addition of several picnic shelters, an amphitheater, parking, a skate park, landscaping, and an entrance onto Union Street.



Asa Bales Park is located near town hall, and additional plans call for the entrance to town hall to be relocated to Union Street to connect to the park. This entrance will also serve as the park's southern access.



Quaker Park is located on the Town's west side. It contains a picnic shelter and a playground. Future plans include additional picnic shelters, parking, a splash park, court and field sports areas, landscaping, and a connection to the Midland Trace Trail.



Quaker Park is located adjacent to the Westfield Public Safety complex, and near several residential neighborhoods. This site is intended to serve as Westfield's active sports park. Due to its convenient location, it should provide play opportunities for hundreds of families.



Simon Moon Park is a small, five acre parcel on the east side. This park is adjacent to the current town public works department campus. Existing facilities include a small parking lot, a picnic shelter, and two playgrounds. Future plans include expansion into the entire 35 acre parcel. The existing buildings will be retained for park department use, and the ponds on site will be enhanced with naturalized landscaping. Additional shelters and parking, as well as a small splash park and open play areas are also planned for this site.



Richardson Park is a five acre site in the southern part of Westfield. There are currently no facilities on this site. Because the site is bordered by Cool Creek, the majority of the site is prone to flooding. This park will be developed as a natural site, with riparian, meadow, and prairie plantings. A boardwalk with platforms will allow users to observe the flora and fauna found on site. This site will also have a connection to the Natalie Wheeler Trail.



Roy O. Hadley Park is a small downtown plaza with a covered seating area and plantings. This parcel is a remnant of a larger parcel and has no plans for expansion at this time.



Raymond Worth Park is the sixth park site. It consists of seventeen acres and lies at the western edges of Washington Township. Currently, this site has been planted with native canopy and understory trees, and has a small gravel lot. Future plans have yet to be finalized for this site.



Park site master plans for Asa Bales, Quaker, Simon Moon, and Richardson parks were developed through a series of meetings with the public and park advisory committee members. The design consultant for these parks gathered initial input from town staff and committee members and presented draft plans for review. Once input on the drafts was compiled, a final plan was prepared and presented to the Town Council for approval. Copies of these plans are included in the appendix. Cost estimates for development are included in the Action and Priorities section.

The Town is actively working with developers to provide ample park and open space within their residential developments. One developer is in the process (as of 2004) of dedicating to the Town several acres in the midst of an established subdivision. Another new site is adjacent to both Cool Creek and a new elementary school, in the north central area of the town. This park is being planned and developed to accommodate both public and school use. Plans call for practice football fields, cross-country paths, and play areas. As these areas come on line, they will be incorporated into the Town's overall park planning and maintenance schedule.

Providing community connections through pathways is another important component in Westfield's comprehensive planning. The most recent township-wide comprehensive plan calls for a trail system linking differing land uses throughout the community. The plan suggests several existing corridors, drainage ways, pipelines, and roadways appropriate for a far-reaching pathway system. In 2003, the Town created a draft trails plan, showing existing parks, railroad corridors, and waterways. This document, along with an updated township thoroughfare plan, will allow the Town to plan for and offer residents and visitors a safe, convenient way to travel, exercise, and recreate.

Public Input and Desires

Summary of Park Survey

- A total of 10,000 surveys were mailed to residents throughout Washington Township. The survey results indicate a strong community support for parks and recreation services.
- A majority (65%) of respondents believe Westfield needs to build more parks now and within 10 years to accommodate growth.
- Most (96%) respondents believe more money should be raised to provide park and recreation services. They split on the method of acquiring such funds:
 - 6% opted for increased state sales tax
 - 11% opted for additional federal funds
 - 21% chose lottery/gaming proceeds
 - 20% chose increased user fees
 - 24% selected increased special use taxes
 - 7% preferred other local funding
 - 2% chose increased state income tax
 - 5% had no preference
- Park development options were evenly split between “active” and “passive” uses
- Eighty-seven (87%) percent of respondents felt outdoor recreation is either essential or desirable.

The following list represents the most desired activities which people either participated in within the last year, or would participate in if facilities were available:

1. Walking/biking/jogging
2. Fairs and Festivals
3. Picnicking
4. Ice skating and sledding
5. Horseback riding

The Town has always considered the public to be a valued component in the planning process. As part of an economic development planning process, a community wide survey was taken to elicit resident’s opinions and comments on a variety of issues.

The survey was mailed to approximately 10,000 households in Washington Township. A return rate of 10% was achieved. While not a large number considering the total population, 1,000 responses does provide a statistically significant confidence level. This survey will allow the town to more accurately forecast what outdoor opportunities and places to provide in the near future.

The questions asked in the survey mirrored those asked by the Department of Natural Resources when preparing their own 5 Year master plans. Asking the same questions will allow the Town to compare local needs with those seen throughout the state. As the state establishes funding priorities, the Town can also see where to put general budget dollars and where to strategically seek grant funds.

Looking at the survey data, it seems clear that parks and recreation are important to local residents. Thirty-eight (38%) percent of respondents felt that Westfield needs more parks immediately, while an additional twenty-seven (27%) percent feel more parks will be needed within ten years. A majority (from 51% to 91%) of residents regularly participate in some kind of outdoor activity. Most people walk, jog, or bike, swim, participate in fairs and festivals, picnic, or golf. While some activities don't see a lot of participation currently, they would if more opportunities were available. For example, only twenty-one (21%) of respondents said they participated in ice skating, but over half (58%) said they would if more opportunities existed. A similar result is seen with horseback riding. Only fifteen (15%) percent ride now, but fifty-one (51%) percent would if facilities were available. Data like this is invaluable for future park planning purposes. Determining what people already do, and what they want to do but don't currently, will help the Town provide adequate and appropriate facilities to satisfy resident's leisure wants.

Park and Recreation Needs

Land Needs

The National Recreation and Park Association is a recognized leader in providing park research and data to local entities. In 1988, they developed a land standard as a means of measuring park provision success. These recommended land standards combine local and regional recommendations to arrive at a total recommended amount of recreation per person. The following chart shows these recommendations.

Land Classification	Recreation Land per Person	Recreation Land per 1000
Local	.020 acres	20 acres
Regional	.035 acres	35 acres
<i>Total</i>	.055 acres	55 acres

Using these recommendations, Westfield should be providing 20 acres per 1,000 residents. With a total population around 10,000 (using the most recent Census data), there should be a total of around 200 acres of park land available to the public. Currently, Westfield owns and maintains 50.15 acres of park lands. Clearly the town should be looking for opportunities to provide additional park lands.

Facility Needs

The National Recreation and Park Association also provides suggestions for park facilities. These suggestions can go hand in hand with the land standards. Having some basic idea of how much of a particular activity to accommodate, can help municipalities provide a good foundation to grow their recreation system.

While these suggestions can help answer some supply and demand questions, the Town of Westfield should survey their local residents and visitors to gain a deeper understanding of how much land and how many facilities should be supplied. With that specific information in hand, the town can look for ways to provide ample indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities.

It will be important for the town to determine just what kind of park system to develop. Municipal agencies typically focus on providing small, active parks for residents. These sites commonly encompass 1-10 acres and include facilities such as playgrounds, ball fields, court sport areas, and picnic shelters. Most municipalities also provide a lot of leisure programming year around. Westfield already owns sites that focus on more passive activities. Richardson and Raymond Worth parks are examples of this. Westfield should continue to accommodate a mix of passive and active sites, while complementing what the Hamilton County and Washington Township park boards are working toward. Westfield should work closely with these two entities so that a balance of park sites, facilities, and opportunities are available for area residents.

Park and Recreation Issues

The issues described below have been developed through the public input and comment processes described earlier in this document. Defining these issues will help the town develop reasonable, achievable goals over the next five years.

System-wide Issues

- Limited facilities and no recreational programs.
- No conservation park areas.
- No sports parks for youth programs.
- Need to consider park land expansion as corporate limits and population grow.

Administrative Issues

- No park board and/or park department—no staff dedicated solely to park issues.
- Need to establish policies for park development, land acquisition, security, and maintenance.
- Need to institute a “Friends of the Parks” program to enlist volunteer workers.
- Need to create a non-reverting budget for park capital and operating costs.
- Need to review, on a yearly basis, the park impact fee.

Park Site Issues

- Need to finalize park development plans for future park site(s).
- Need to fund and implement park development plans.
- Need to implement maintenance procedures at each park site.

Goals

Agency Administrative Goals

The following goals are among those articulated through the public input survey and through the economic development planning process and are intended to provide the Town Council with some direction for park system development and enhancement.

Goal: Westfield should clarify the institutional roles and responsibilities of the Town, Township, and County park boards.

Action: meet with involved agencies and develop criteria.

Goal: Encourage ongoing communication and joint planning between all park boards.

Action: attend other agency meetings.

Action: become member of other agency boards.

Action: encourage other agencies to become advisory committee members

Goal: Continue to promote a stable revenue source to support parks and recreation.

Action: lobby fiscal oversight agencies to support park and recreation efforts.

Action: provide education on park and recreation benefits.

Goal: Develop and implement a plan for the extension of the Monon Trail.

Action: finalize design and construction documents for Monon Trail

Goal: Address connectivity in park master planning.

Action: include connections and parks in all planning efforts.

Action: include regulations requiring developers to provide connection trails through their projects.

Goal: Continue contact and discussions with two grassroots organizations:

- Monon Greenway Committee
- Hoosier Rails to Trails

Goal: Develop a partnership program between the Town, Westfield-Washington Schools, not-for-profits, and other private entities.

Goal: Create and implement a land acquisition policy.

Goal: Create and implement a park site development policy.

Goal: Create relationships with developers, other recreation providers, and school administration.

Goal: Create, staff, and fund a separate park department within the town.

Goal: Review annually the park master plan and park impact fee ordinance.

Goal: Continue to work with developers to provide for future park needs.

Development Goals

Goal: Finalize development and construction of existing park sites: Asa Bales, Quaker, Simon Moon, Richardson.

Goal: Develop site master plans for Raymond Worth Park and Countryside Park.

Goal: Finalize plans for Monon and Midland Trails and begin construction.

- Monon from 146th to SR 32, and elsewhere where new development abuts.
- Midland from Ditch Road to Gray Road, and elsewhere where new development abuts.

Priorities and Action Plan

Years 2005-2009

The attached chart shows the expected development hierarchy. Park advisory committee members reviewed the site master plans, and worked with staff to devise suggested development priorities. These proposals were then forwarded to the Town Council for their review and approval.

Funding and Marketing

Any discussion regarding parks and recreation must include some consideration of how to fund development and on-going maintenance. There are numerous funding strategies available to the Town. Using general fund dollars will allow a limited amount of property to be acquired and/or developed. By relying solely on these funds, Westfield will only be able to supply a portion of the growing demand for park and recreation services.

Grant programs are another viable option for park development. There are state and federal programs that match money from the town and could be used for land acquisition and facility development. A number of private companies and foundations also give money for park and recreation services. Westfield has used these strategies in the past and will certainly continue to do so.

Public/private ventures are another funding option. There are a number of local corporate citizens who should be approached as building or endowment partners. Having leisure opportunities close to home is very important to business development. The Town should explore developing close relationships with local business leaders, with a common goal of park and recreation sponsorship.

Impact and user fees are also common methods of park funding support. Impact fees are paid by developers to help offset the burden new subdivisions will have on park facilities. User fees are typically collected for park programs, special events, and special facility uses. People engaging in those activities will pay a small fee to cover costs.

The Town may also wish to consider privatizing some services. It could be more cost effective to contract for mowing and lawn maintenance than it would be to hire personnel to perform the same jobs. Similarly, it may be cheaper to solicit outside personnel to conduct leisure classes and programming.

Marketing parks and recreation goes hand in hand with funding. Recreation and natural resources are significant to economic development—at local, regional, and statewide levels. The importance of parks, leisure opportunities, and green spaces needs to be better communicated to local residents and to economic development experts.

This latest park and recreation master plan is merely one tool the Town can use to increase Westfield's quality of life, entice business and industry to locate in town, and create an area attractive to residents and visitors. From this basic framework, future strategic plans will be formed and implemented, shaping a vibrant, thriving community.